

Hearing on the governance of higher education (SB no. 1011)

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I'm Jonathan Daube. I have been a resident of Manchester since 1987, when I was appointed president of the largest of Connecticut's twelve community colleges. I retired in 2008 after almost twenty-one years. But in July I flunked retirement, albeit temporarily, and am presently serving as interim president of Middlesex Community College in Middletown and Meriden.

I lived through a major reorganization in Massachusetts in the early eighties when I was president of Berkshire Community College and, of course, lived through the merging of Connecticut's technical colleges and community colleges in the late eighties/early nineties. That merger, I might add, has not been completed.

My wife hails from Minnesota, so I know something about the merger there that is being touted by some as a success: our friends report another side to the story. I have heard wild stories about the number of employees in the Chancellor's office in St. Paul.

In my experience, mergers usually occur either when there is anger toward an individual or when there is a desire to be perceived to be saving money. Or both. Anger at individuals should, in my judgment, be directed to those individuals: no more and no less. As for the saving of money through systemic change: I have never seen it happen ... which does not mean it is impossible.

The devil, I do believe, is in the details. The evidence, underscored by your own Program Review and Investigations Committee towards the end of 2010, is that most modes of governance can be made to work. But only if thoughtfully put together. Hurried reorganization that is not carefully planned can become a smoldering disaster. Example: after many, many wasted years, Massachusetts now has a fairly transparent

system for the selection of trustees that is, I think, worthy of scrutiny. It took decades to get there.

I come before you having been president of a fairly large community college; now I am at a small one. Six quick observations:

1. The System Office, headed by Chancellor Marc Herzog, performs many tasks that, absent a central office, would have to be duplicated at each college. Legal services, i.t. and much else. I would welcome a credible study of what services are essential and what might be delegated to or absorbed by individual campuses. There probably are some functions that can be further streamlined or integrated through technology without interfering with students' campus experiences. But I have to stress: the study would have to be credible.
2. We were told that a cut in administrative positions in Hartford would lead inexorably to more direct support for students. The budget proposed for 2012 does not support this proposition.
3. The missions of the state universities and community colleges are different. In a time of very serious budget constraints, I fear that voices for access and opportunity for those without power and influence might be silenced. In the budget proposal I have seen, my fear is confirmed: the cuts proposed for the community colleges is greater than those for the University of Connecticut and the four state universities.
4. When I came to Connecticut, it is fair to say, transitions from community colleges to baccalaureate institutions were difficult. This is no longer the case.
5. What aint broke should be scrutinized and updated ... "oiled" if you will ... but not necessarily "fixed".
6. I don't think present trustees, presidents, faculty, staff or students should have the last word: that resides with you, our elected officials. But shouldn't there be some consultation?

In no way do I oppose some form of thoughtful reorganization; we can always do things better. But I urge care and caution. The devil, as I said before, truly is in the details.

I'll be happy to respond to questions, either now or at another time.